

## **Federal Aid to School Libraries – A Perspective**

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*In my mind, the most important single kind of equipment in a school is a library  
..... In general, one can say that a school with a poor library is likely to be a poor  
school.<sup>1</sup>*

Soon after the founding in 1959 of the Australian College of Education (ACE) (now known as the Australian College of Educators), its National Council, through its various Branches, embarked upon and coordinated a project to draw attention to the parlous state of science facilities in secondary schools across the country. Also within the framework of the project was a level of disquiet concerning deficiencies in the number of suitably qualified science teachers in schools. The project led to sustained pressure on education authorities to address the issues and undoubtedly had significant influence in the provision of federal funding for secondary school science facilities from the mid-1960s.

There is no evidence from perusal of the archival records of the ACE that the College played a similar proactive role in the provision of federal aid to school libraries. Nevertheless, the records and anecdotal evidence indicate the positive action taken by individual members of the College and the supportive role of the College generally in the successful initial and ongoing provision of federal funding for school library services. This paper explores these issues, with some emphasis on the South Australian connection and also, where appropriate, the role of the College and its members.

In the early to mid-1960s, when efforts began to be made to raise awareness of the importance of school and children's libraries for the personal and educational development of young people, there was a paucity of library provision for children. Libraries of substance at that time were virtually non-existent in primary schools. At secondary level most schools had a classroom set aside as a library, with a collection limited in size, scope and recency, due mainly to an almost total lack of trained library staff. In addition, teachers at the time were largely unskilled in the art of resource-based learning and indeed were unaware of its relevance or value. Fortunately there were a few outstanding exceptions. (In South Australia, Adelaide Boys High School, Marion High School and Prince Alfred College were shining examples of quality provision and service for the time.)

The Library Association of Australia (LAA) was aware of and concerned about the dearth of suitable library services for young people and commissioned some research studies and publications to draw attention to the plight. Foremost among these was a nation-wide study by Professor Sara Fenwick of the University of Chicago. The outcome of her work was the production of the publication, *School and Childrens Libraries in Australia*,<sup>2</sup> which became the basis for a professional and political campaign by the LAA from 1965 onwards.

In the few years immediately prior to this activity, South Australia was better placed than some other states in that it had a core of prominent educators and librarians working mainly on behalf of the LAA to promote and lobby for a better deal for library services for young people. Prominent in the leadership of this group were Ernest Roe, Marjorie Roe, Barbara Buick and Joan Holland (later Joan Brewer). Their

lobbying included a deputation to the Minister of Education which led to an enquiry in 1962 by the State Librarian (Hedley Brideson) into school library services.

Largely as a result of these efforts the Education Department in South Australia agreed to new policies from 1964 to provide libraries in all primary schools of above five classrooms in size and to major upgrading of secondary school libraries. At the same time the Department established a program for the release of classroom teachers to be trained at a teachers college as teacher librarians under the direction of Joan Brewer. This was the first step in a major commitment by local education authorities to develop ongoing practices for the pre-service and post-service training of teacher librarians which, over succeeding years, saw the introduction of graduate and postgraduate courses.

The lobby group had also been pressing administrators, the SA Institute of Teachers and politicians to upgrade the qualifications for and the status of the position of Supervisor of School Libraries. These efforts culminated in July 1964 with the recruitment and appointment of James Dwyer to the position. Shortly afterwards, a School Libraries Branch with appropriately qualified staff was established to develop a viable support network for the revamped school library program.

These changes owed much not only to the lobby group and the LAA, but importantly to the sympathetic ear and strong support of Albert Jones, SA Superintendent of Recruiting and Training (and later Director-General of Education). He was a Founder member of the ACE and served with distinction on its National Council for many years. As the senior departmental administrator with overall responsibility for libraries and teachers colleges, his influence with the hierarchy of the Education Department proved pivotal at this period. The cause was also greatly enhanced by research studies and publications into the benefits of libraries in education by Ernest Roe and others.

Nationally, early in 1965, as an outcome of the Fenwick Report, the LAA established the Committee on Training of School Librarians, under the direction of Margery Ramsey. Membership included the heads of school library services in NSW (Joyce Fardell), WA (Lawrence McGrath) and SA (James Dwyer). Much of the committee's work involved contact with education bodies to ascertain the existence of and planning for professional training facilities and courses for teacher librarians. The committee continued to meet until 1967 and then reported to the LAA.

Archival records of the LAA held at the National Library of Australia (NLA) in Canberra refer briefly to correspondence between the committee and ACE indicating the cooperation and support of the College in the committee's aims and activities. Similar reference is found in the Business Papers for meetings of the ACE Council in 1966. Unfortunately, however, the relevant minutes of those meetings are missing from the ACE archival record.

By 1966 the calls for Commonwealth intervention to provide financial support for libraries in educational institutions had grown apace. These calls had come from not just the LAA but also other bodies including the Australian School Library Association (ASLA), state and private school authorities, teacher associations, school councils and professors of education. Of special note was the backing of the Australian Teachers Federation (ATF).

In a letter dated 29 September 1967 from Gavin Semple, President of the ATF, to a recently-formed committee of the LAA (referred to below) seeking to coordinate

action on the matter, the position of the ATF is clearly elaborated. Semple quoted the policies of the ATF as follows:

*1957: That the Federal Government make grants to the States for the development of childrens libraries in schools and municipalities.*

*1959: That the ATF press for greater library facilities, both within and without the schools of the Commonwealth.*

*1966: That the ATF press for adequate Federal aid for State, Municipal, Teachers College, Technical College and School Libraries.*<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned above, seeing some advantage in endeavouring to coordinate action, the LAA at this time had established the Committee on Federal Aid to Secondary School Libraries, with Dr Andrew Fabinyi as Convenor and Margaret Trask as Secretary. The Association had reasoned that concentrating initially on secondary schools would be politically astute in terms of total costs and in that it would be following the recently introduced funding program for secondary school science facilities. The LAA also believed that an extension to primary school libraries could be successfully pursued at a later date. Understandably, there were reservations about this priority from bodies such as the ASLA. Indeed, Brewer claimed that:

*most educators would have argued in favour of providing libraries at primary level ..... But it was apparent that the central government was reluctant to move into the area of primary education at that stage.*<sup>4</sup>

Despite such reservations the LAA persisted, providing generous funding for the committee's work.

For four years Fabinyi's group worked assiduously, with its modus operandi centring particularly on contacting the widest possible range of education-related bodies to seek their support and advice and encourage their active involvement. LAA archival records from this time contain numerous references to activities of and correspondence from and to the committee. They also show an outstanding degree of support and encouragement and some are worthy of special mention.

The quotation at the beginning of this article is typical of the support elicited. It is contained in a letter to the committee, dated 9 October 1967, from William (Bill) Connell, Professor of Education, University of Sydney.

In similar vein and perhaps portraying for the period a surprisingly deep understanding of the central role of the library in school planning and service provision, is a letter of 17 October 1967 from A G ('Bon') Austin, Professor of Education at the University of Melbourne, which states, 'It also means ..... that, architecturally, the library and the channels by which it serves the school must be given first priority in school planning'.<sup>5</sup> Austin also gives attention to the need for new methods of teaching and for a move from a single text book to the use of a variety of resources. Of special significance is his recognition of the implications for teacher training, 'This also means, of course, a revolution in the school library and in the training of teachers'.<sup>6</sup>

An outstanding endorsement of the need, value and importance of trained professional library staff is contained in a letter of 5 October 1967 to the committee from John Dunning, Chairman of the Headmasters Conference of the Independent Schools of Australia:

*For the past twelve years, I have had a trained librarian on the staff of the Senior School (Prince Alfred College). No money is better spent than the amount we pay as her salary.*<sup>7</sup>

A final response to the Fabinyi committee's correspondence should be mentioned. On 16 October 1967 H R McWilliam, Honorary Secretary of the ACE, wrote to advise that the committee's request for support for its activities would be placed on the Agenda for the ACE National Council meeting on 20 October 1967. A further letter dated 1 December 1967 states that the matter was discussed by Council and that 'Council decided that ..... it is aware of the importance of remedying the deficiencies of school libraries and it supports in principle the efforts being made'.<sup>8</sup>

Further clarification of the ACE position is given in papers contained in the ACE National Archive. Here it is noted that the Fabinyi committee intended to approach the Prime Minister (Harold Holt) directly and a response from the ACE on the merits of that proposal would be appreciated. Minutes of the 36<sup>th</sup> meeting of the ACE National Council note the correspondence from the LAA committee and state:

*In view of the fact that members of the College have been contacted directly on the matter, and have made submissions, it was felt that it would not be necessary for the College as such to take any action nor would it be practicable ..... It was resolved that the Library Association of Australia be advised that the Council is aware of the importance of remedying the deficiencies of school libraries, and supports the efforts being made in approaching the Prime Minister.*<sup>9</sup>

While relying on the Fabinyi committee to liaise with other professional bodies and to pursue the political agenda, the LAA had other groups of its members preparing critical background documents for publication and dissemination in support of its case for federal aid. Foremost among these publications was *Standards and Objectives for School Libraries*.<sup>10</sup> As the title implies, this document outlined the purposes, the educational value and the uses of the school library and set out minimum standards of space, design, staffing and resources required to make the library operate effectively in supporting the school curriculum and the holistic development of students. Early in 1968 the LAA also produced and widely distributed its *School Library Manifesto* in pamphlet form.<sup>11</sup> Both publications were enormously important in promoting the case for federal financial assistance.

On the political front Fabinyi arranged a series of meetings with parliamentarians to enlist their support. Significant among these was a meeting of Fabinyi and Trask in Canberra with Senator John Gorton, Minister for Education and Science. It was at this meeting that Gorton, strongly supportive of the committee's aims, suggested that a meeting with Prime Minister Harold Holt might be advantageous. The suggestion was followed up and on 12 December 1967 the Prime Minister replied, agreeing to arrange a meeting early in 1968.

Sadly, within a week the Prime Minister was missing, presumed drowned. This tragic event caused postponement of lobbying action at the highest level while the political process was resolved. Eventually, on 10 January 1968, Gorton was sworn in as Prime Minister and shortly afterwards Hon. J Malcolm Fraser was appointed as Minister for Education and Science.

Over the next few months events moved at a rapid rate. In March, Fabinyi, Trask and Dwyer met with Minister Fraser at his Melbourne office, outlining the campaign and its progress to that date. Then on 1 May Fabinyi and Trask had a further meeting with the Minister and a departmental officer in Canberra. Fabinyi's report of that meeting is highly significant. It reads in part:

*We emphasized that Federal aid can only be effective if the provision of libraries ..... books and trained librarians proceeds concurrently and both Mr Fraser and his departmental officer were in agreement with the principle.*<sup>12</sup>

He concluded by stating that the Minister undertook to ensure that the matter would be brought to Cabinet.

Thus, in the Federal Budget of August 1968, an initial sum of \$27,000,000 was allocated for the development of libraries in government and non-government secondary schools throughout Australia. When the Bill was later presented to and passed by Parliament it contained provision for portion of that funding to be spent on establishing or extending training courses for teacher librarians.

The legislation also established 'a committee to advise on conditions and standards for the effective development of the new program'.<sup>13</sup> When that committee was formed early in 1969 its Chairman was Sir Brian Hone, erstwhile Headmaster of Melbourne Grammar School and a Founder member and Fellow of the ACE. The South Australian representative on the committee was the Director of Catholic Education, Rev. Edward (Ted) Mulvihill, a prominent figure in the early years of the SA Chapter of the ACE and also a Fellow of the College. He remained the representative until 1972 when replaced by Dwyer.

Funding for the program was administered through the Department of Education and Science. When in 1973 the Schools Commission came into existence, this new body became responsible for the scheme and for its continuing advisory committee. Significantly, the Commission also launched a similar and much heralded program of funding for primary school libraries, to operate in somewhat similar fashion to the secondary scheme. The Commission appointed a separate committee to oversee the new program, with Doreen Goodman as Chair. Joan Brewer and James Dwyer (both members and later Fellows of the ACE) were appointed to the committee.

Thus the efforts of many educational, library and other professional groups and interested individuals over some years came to fruition. In the intervening years the injection of federal funding has transformed libraries in schools across the country, greatly assisted in the training and employment of professional and ancillary staff and provided opportunities for vast changes in teaching and learning practices.

However, the provision of finance for establishing, extending and improving school libraries was not the extent of federal funding affecting school libraries. The Schools Commission also supported a number of other related programs, two of which had special significance for South Australia.

In 1975 the SA Government, through the cooperation of the Education Department, the State Library, the Institutes Association and local councils, launched a school/community libraries program for rural communities which were too small to support a public library. The local school library would be converted and used for both school and community. Just over 50 such centres were proposed, the first (at Pinnaroo) coming into operation in 1977.

The Schools Commission became interested in the concept of joint use, especially as some examples of joint use of education facilities were being trialled in all states and territories. Accordingly, in 1977 it agreed to fund a research project into the joint use of library facilities for educational and general community purposes:

*The Commission was particularly concerned with the question of the integration of school libraries with public or community libraries in the light of the Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Public Libraries in Australia and with the implications of the recommendations of that report for school library policies in the country.*<sup>14</sup>

The study was carried out by James Dwyer during late 1977 and early 1978. In all, 21 services were examined in situ and the directors of a number of other minor projects were consulted by phone or letter. The report on the study was presented to the Schools Commission and published in 1978. As mentioned in the report's introduction, the terms of reference set by the Commission called for a factual study; hence no conclusions or recommendations were made.

The other program of interest referred to above was a computerised cataloguing service. In 1970–71 the Department of Education and Science funded a feasibility trial to ascertain the suitability for schools of the National Library catalogue card service. For a variety of reasons the overwhelming view of those involved in the trial 'was that the service was unsatisfactory for school purposes'.<sup>15</sup> Subsequently a centralised service involving computer generated microfiche card images as well as hard copy catalogue cards was launched by the SA Education Department in 1975. Entitled 'South Australian Education Resources Information System' (SAERIS), the scheme provided printed catalogue records to all interested government and selected non-government schools in the state.

In the meantime, conscious of the duplication of effort in thousands of schools' individually cataloguing copies of the same resources, the Schools Commission funded two studies (in 1974<sup>16</sup> and 1977<sup>17</sup>), both by Wesley Young and Douglas Down, into the feasibility of a national catalogue card service for Australian schools.

Following these studies, the Commission agreed to fund, for three years from 1978 to 1980, a pilot project called Australian Schools Catalogue Information Service (ASCIS). Based on SAERIS and using SAERIS' database in Adelaide, the scheme was a multi-faceted one which provided catalogue cards, microfiche output and machine-readable catalogue data to selected government and non-government schools and central school library services across Australia. In return, central services would provide locally produced catalogue data in machine-readable format to SAERIS. The primary purpose was to test the feasibility and acceptability of a national, cross-system catalogue service specifically for schools.

Despite some anticipated initial territorial and practical issues which were gradually overcome, the pilot project showed unquestionably that a national centralised catalogue service for schools would be advisable, practicable and acceptable. With the support of education authorities across all systems in Australia, the Schools Commission set about formally establishing the service, using the expanded SAERIS database, locating the service centrally in Melbourne and continuing to use the name ASCIS. The Commission appointed a committee representative of the various education sectors to administer the service under the initial Chairmanship of Colin Macdonald of NSW. James Dwyer was the SA representative and later Chairman.

Without doubt this was one of the few truly successful national, cooperative endeavours in Australian education history. It is pleasing to be able to conclude this outline of federal aid to school libraries with a project which had such a positive impact on the majority of the nation's schools and is still an ongoing service into the digital age. It is also pleasing to note that many ACE members had influential roles in bringing this project and its precursors to fruition.

## References

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- <sup>2</sup> LAA (1996). Cheshire, Melbourne
- <sup>3</sup> LAA Committee, Op. cit.
- <sup>4</sup> Brewer, Joan (1982), A Critical History of the Development of School Libraries in South Australia. Thesis, Monash University, p. 261
- <sup>5</sup> LAA Committee, Op. cit.
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>9</sup> Australian College of Educators Official Archive (ACEOA), Box 033-04
- <sup>10</sup> LAA (1966), *Standards and Objectives for School Libraries*. Cheshire, Melbourne
- <sup>11</sup> LAA (1968), School Library Manifesto – The School Library – The Heart of the School
- <sup>12</sup> LAA Committee, Op. cit.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Dwyer, James G (1978), *Cooperation or Compromise: School/Community Libraries in Australia*. Gillingham, Adelaide, p. iii
- <sup>15</sup> Dwyer, James G (1981), Centralised Services for School Libraries. In John Cook (Ed.), *School Librarianship*. Pergamon, Sydney, p. 233
- <sup>16</sup> Down, Douglas W & Young, Wesley A (1975), Cataloguing for Schools: The Feasibility of Catalogue Card Services for all Schools in Australia. Melbourne State College, Carlton, Vic.
- <sup>17</sup> Down, Douglas W & Young, Wesley A (1977), Australian Schools Cataloguing Service. Melbourne State College, Carlton, Vic.

Following an early career in education, James Dwyer undertook studies in librarianship and worked at the National Library of Australia and subsequently as Chief Librarian of the Canberra Public Library Service. He returned to education as Superintendent of Curriculum (Libraries) in the Education Department of South Australia for 25 years and later as Executive Director of the South Australian Institute for Catholic Teacher Education, retiring in 1997. He was a member of the Libraries Committee of the Australian Schools Commission, Chairman of the Australian Schools Catalogue Information Service, Chairman of the Australian Bibliographic Network Committee, and Chairman of the Australian Library and Information Association. He was elected Fellow of the Australian Library and Information Association in 1982 and Fellow of the Australian College of Educators in 1981.